

LANCASTER COUNTY
RUN RESPONSE COMMITTEE TEAM 1
March 22, 2005
1:15 – 2:30 p.m.
Human Services Office 555 S. 9th Street

Attendance: Melissa Beecher, Sheli Schindler, Bob Willhelm, Sandy Thompson, Cheri Miller, Merry Wills, Amy Lamphear, Kris Strand, Deb Hynek, Sherrie Spilde.

Review MOU

HHS is taking the MOU to the Service Area Administrator on April 1st. The group decided that it would be best for HHS to review the document and make any changes first then the other agencies will review it.

Developing a Crisis Plan for state wards (Assessment, HHS, LPD)

Sandy explained that she, Sherrie, Sheli and Melissa met to discuss a way to better help LPD and Detention determine what to do with the placement of HHS youth. Sandy passed out the draft runaway/crisis plan that was developed. This will be filled out by the caseworker and faxed to detention. Its purpose is to serve as a communication tool so that Detention/Assessment know the plan or disposition options for the youth is once the youth is located. This is intended to save time in determining a placement for the youth. If this should also be given to LPD to update the broadcast report and how LPD fits in with this crisis plan was discussed at length. It was decided that two HHS teams would try a pilot for a month to see how it works. The pilot will include faxing this the crisis plan to Detention as well as giving the updates to Karen at LPD. It was mentioned that once NCJIS is up and running this tool may not be necessary.

Update on Cedars sending resource information to families of non-system youth on run

The documents and the brochure are being finalized and Cedars will begin mailing to these families soon.

Design brochure with resources to include with Cedars information

Melissa, LeAnn, Sheli and Corey are working on a small brochure with resources that may want to be included in this mailing as well as updating the guide to the juvenile court system brochure.

Vera study on runaways

Melissa passed out a summary of the Vera Study on Youth who are chronically AWOL from Foster Care. See attached summary.

The group discussed the statistic in the report that most youth run from placement because of a perceived or actual problems with placement (belief that the current placement wasn't correct and feeling disempowered, they thought their case was not progressing as it should). Other reasons included to see a boyfriend or girlfriend or boredom.

Amy with CASA stated that they had planned on looking into having CASA volunteers for status offense cases and 3B cases and wondered if there would be a need for this. Sandy and Melissa both agreed that there are plenty of youth that would benefit from this. Sandy stated that there

are at least 175 youth in just two teams of HHS. Melissa stated that she believes that the number of 3B has increased recently. Melissa agreed to contact Judge Dawson's office to discuss this possibility.

Statistics and ideas from Omaha shelters

Merry stated that she contacted the Omaha shelters and each shelter operates differently. When they call the youth on run differs – some wait and call the caseworker with others the manager decides. One shelter said that their location is a beneficial because they are far away from where youth want to run. Merry reported that many of the shelters have the same dynamics as Cedars with a mix of youth and treatment level youth. Many of the Omaha shelters deal with runaways by sending them to Lincoln. A couple of the shelters in Omaha were gender specific.

Result of LPD's email to officers regarding the role of the Assessment Center

Bob Wilhelm with LPD sent an email to all officers disputing the prevailing thought the Assessment Center will not help them place a youth.

He specified that the ideal client to bring to the Assessment Center is:

1. A youth between 12-17 in law enforcement custody after being on run and
 - a. Parents are unreachable
 - b. The youth is out of county or out of state
 - c. A youth whose parents are on the way and you need a place to hold the youth for a few hours and don't want to sit with them
 - d. Assessment is needed to help coordinate with HHS regarding State Wards
2. A youth between 12-17 who is in custody for a law violation
 - a. You can't find a parent and don't feel comfortable releasing the youth
 - b. If you need help from Assessment to coordinate with HHS on State Wards
3. There may be other scenarios but needs to be discussed on a case by case basis. Bob added that any youth 12-17 that you cannot place within a reasonable amount of time of should contact Youth Assessment at 441-5656 to see if they can help. Assessment cannot keep a youth there more than 23 hours.

Set next meeting date:

Tuesday April 26 at 1:30 p.m.

SUMMARY OF AWOL STUDY

- AWOL is a marker of other problems
- Youth with a history of AWOL that go into foster care have worse school attendance and attend school less often after placement than other foster care youth with out a history of AWOL
- Status offenders in foster care go AWOL more than other youth
- NYC Administration for Children's Services average 4000 AWOLs per year

- AWOL youth is usually 15 years old or older and ¾ of the AWOL youth come from group homes
- Found that AWOL is concentrated among a small number of youth
- 3% of the youth that entered care went AWOL more than twice but accounted for 54% of the AWOL events
- Very few AWOL youth spent time on the street, most stayed with friends
- 2/3 of the AWOL youth returned voluntarily
- 1/3 of the AWOL youth encountered no risk, 1/3 encountered moderate risk, and 1/3 encountered high risk situations
- Most AWOL youth left because of perceived or actual problems with placement (belief that the current placement wasn't correct and feeling disempowered, they thought their case was not progressing as it should, boredom, or to see a boyfriend or girlfriend)
- Suggestions by care facilities on how they prevent AWOL
 1. Provide a counseling session after a youth runs to find out more about why the youth went AWOL and where they went
 2. Extend curfew and be more flexible
 3. Allow more home passes
 4. Punitive such as increased supervision and lose privileges such as take away single room, not allowed home passes, etc. (some believed this increased the youths desire to AWOL again)
- Youth enter foster care 40% had one or more AWOL (most experienced emotional or psychological problems before entering foster care so treatment and counseling of these youth is greatly needed)
- 11% of the youth said that they wouldn't run if problems related to placement were resolved or if an alternative placement was offered
- Youth that have a history of running prior to placement are much more likely to AWOL
- Youth running from a group home are less likely to sleep on the streets than youth running from their family home
- Most youth have a specific destination before leaving and very few had nowhere to go (destination include friends, family or boyfriend/Girlfriend) -Most AWOL youth visit friends
- Youth with an abusive family background tend to associate with negative networks of people which increase the risk they encounter
- There was no relationship found between number of AWOLs and increased risk

Solutions

1. Find a more appropriate placement for the youth
2. Identify interests of the youth and activities that the youth enjoys and develop a care plan that incorporates those activities
3. Decrease boredom by offering more activities
4. Increase home passes
5. Develop a more flexible environment (example: be more flexible with regard to being late from a home passes)
6. Increase the connection to the staff and peers (example resolve peer issues immediately, provide groups to establish relationships, provide an environment where staff can establish a connection with the youth, offer close monitoring of youth with a history of running)
7. Decrease AWOLs due to visiting boyfriends/girlfriends by instituting a Pregnancy/HIV/STD Curriculum